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Greymark Construction Transitioning
from Mother to Daughter

Greymark Construction | Houston, Texas



Greymark Construction Transitioning from Mother to Daughter

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

When Leslie King chose her company name back in 1994, she was already thinking ahead to succession. She thought Greymark Construction would lend itself to a second generation ownership better than a self-named business. She had envisioned that one of her two daughters might continue the business while she had them cleaning up job sites.

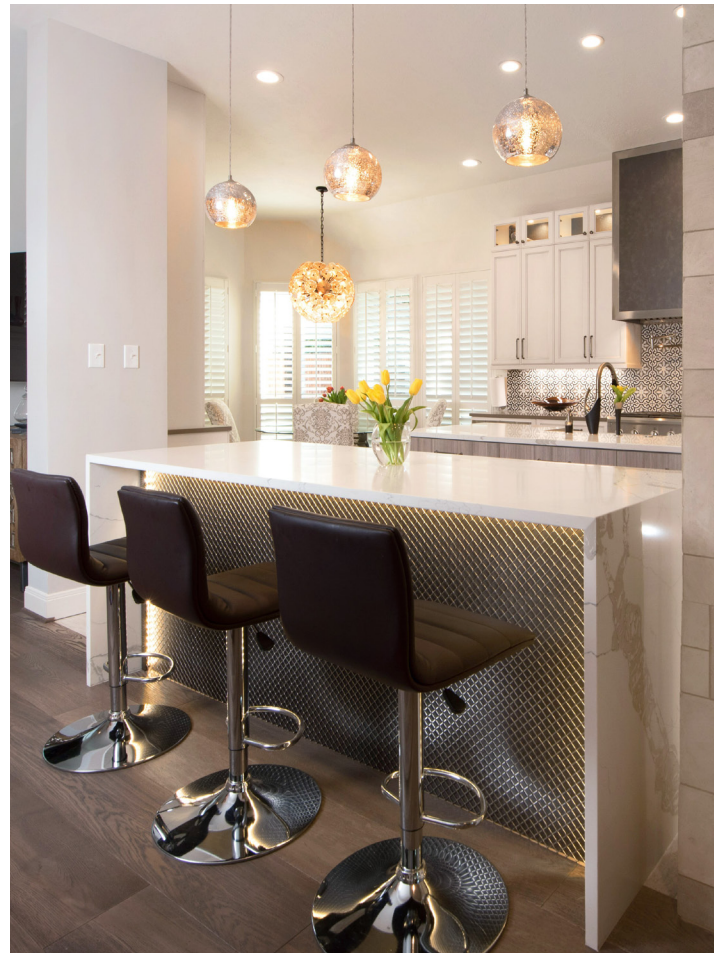
Now, 25 years later, her older daughter, Kelly Kirk, has left her career as a certified public accountant to join Greymark as a vice president, learning the business while she prepares to succeed King as president. Kelly admits that she isn't sure how much help she was cleaning up those job sites as a kid, but the exposure to the business got under her skin.

"I've always really been involved, even when I had other summer jobs. A lot of our trades have seen me grow up. As a CPA I was involved in the financial side of the business, of course, but now I'm coming back as an adult with real developed skills."

As she considered retirement, King had been talking about transferring ownership or shutting down the company because selling an owner-centric remodeling company doesn't seem to work in the Houston market. Although her younger daughter, Casey Bemis, who is an architectural intern in Dallas, decided that she was not ready to join the business, Kelly realized that "Greymark has always had my heart" and joined the company full-time in April 2018, almost a year after she told her mother that she was interested.

"When I came on board, everyone on staff had the opportunity to interview me, to make sure I was a good fit, as they do with all new hires. My mom has built a fantastic team of very strong, independent personalities around her. They love being here. They welcomed me with open arms and have been extremely supportive," Kelly said.

"We really are a family here," she proclaimed. "We set everyone up for success. We believe that if you find a good person, you should keep him or her. In fact, our longest



serving employee has been here 10 years.”

Also proving that Greymark Construction is a family business, Taylor Kirk, Kelly’s husband, joined the design/build firm in September 2017 to help meet the construction demand caused by Hurricane Harvey after working as a cellarman for a brewery. It was all hands on deck for Greymark, and the company needed a field superintendent. But Taylor too had to be interviewed by the team. He now handles the sales and marketing for the company.

Currently Greymark’s staff includes 11 employees, although in Kelly’s five-year plan for growth, she will have to hire more staffers to reach her goals of becoming the largest remodeling business in Houston and almost doubling the company’s revenues. “We won’t be able to get there on current staffing. All of our projects are custom. The design portion is especially time consuming” as the designer meets multiple times with each client.

Both mother and daughter believe in cross training employees. “Everyone has had different roles in the company. Everyone does a little bit of everything. Everyone is fluid here,” Kelly said. Using her background in finance, Kelly formally documented the design process with flow charts when she joined the company to make sure the company could still function in times of crisis. They have a succession plan for all employees because “you never know

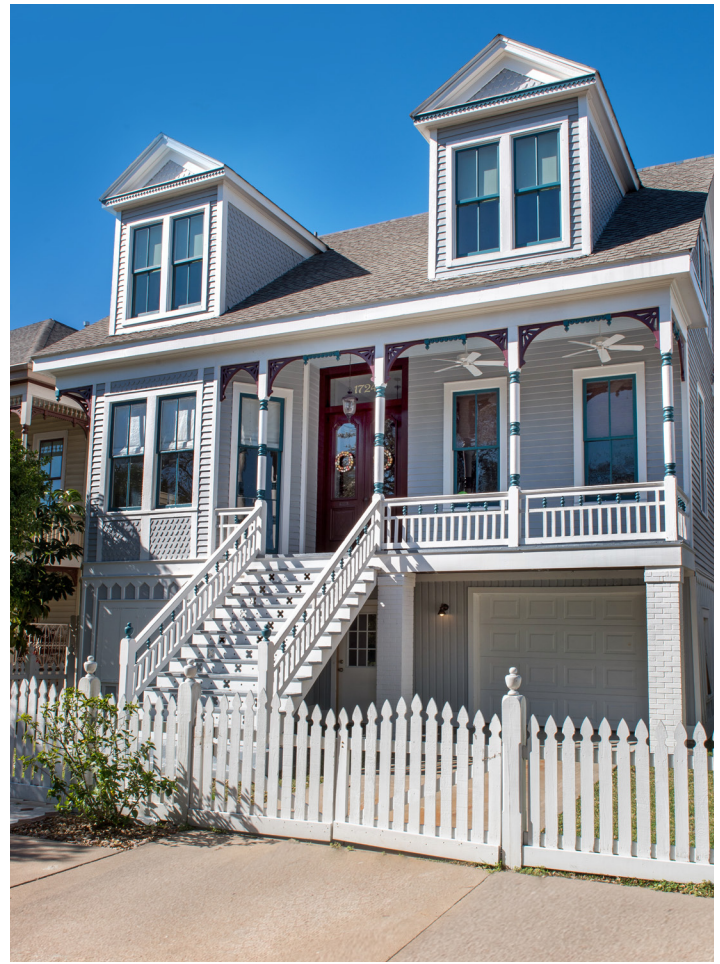




what's going to happen.”

Kelly also uses her background in finance and accounting to deal with the numbers in the business – cash flow projections, spreadsheets, financial statements and such.

Watching the boom and bust of construction during her childhood, she chose the “safe” career of accounting and, while she loved the safety of accounting, it became too safe, even boring, for her after a half-dozen years. The controlled risks of remodeling are more appealing to her these days. Greymark has no minimum threshold price or size for its projects, which lends itself to surviving bust periods. “Bathroom remodels got us through the last recession,” she said.



The flexibility of working for a small company is also appealing to her at age 30. If she has to leave work for a doctor's appointment, she can make up the time at the end of the day, for example. With the birth of her first child looming, she is happy the company has a generous maternity policy for both primary and secondary caregivers among its benefits.

Like most builders, she loves having something tangible to look at for her efforts. She said she gets a thrill when she turns over a completed project to the homeowners and they say, "Oh, my goodness, this is amazing!"

As for the future of the company, "there are so many different avenues we could go down," but Kelly does not anticipate moving the company into new construction. "New construction would require a largely different structure than what we have now. We have set up a company that is extremely good at what we do."

And Greymark has the crystal on the wall to prove it! Greymark Construction won the Greater Houston Builders Association Grand Remodeler prize in 2010, 2011 and 2012, in addition to the 2012 Chrysalis Award for the nation's Best Universal Design in 2012. Greymark won the Best Whole House Remodel, Best Remodeled Kitchen over \$100,000, Best Remodeled Kitchen \$50,000-\$100,000, and Best Addition Under \$150,000, all in 2018. Greymark

also received a Texas Lone Star award for Best Historic Renovation.

The Better Business Bureau recognized Greymark with its award for excellence in 2009 through 2019 in recognition of its A+ rating. Texas Association of Builders gave Greymark its Texas Lone Star Award for Best Historic Renovation over \$500,000 and Best Historically Sensitive Renovation between \$100,000 and \$250,000, both in 2017. Other national recognitions are being named one of Remodeling Magazine's Big 50 and Best Whole House Remodel from Professional Remodeler Magazine.

After 25 years in business Leslie King is now recognized as a leader in the construction industry. Her daughter Kelly Kirk admits, "For such a small person, she has some big shoes to fill. I'm never going to be her, but I will take the best parts of her forward."



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