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Lancaster Homes in the
Heart of Oak Forest Is
Truly a Family Business

Lancaster Homes | Houston, Texas



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By Kathy Bowen Stolz | Photography by Kathleen O. Ryan



For owner Chris Franz, Lancaster Homes is a family business, and that's an important component of his company's past, present and future. As the company web site states, "Our family created this business, and our business is creating the family dream...through exceptional homes."

Chris and his wife Colette work together every day from their on-site sales office in Candlelight Place at Oak Forest, a 61-lot subdivision of newly constructed homes built exclusively by Lancaster Homes; it is located just north of Houston's Heights and outside the 610 loop. Chris, who is the company president, oversees the construction side, and Colette, who is operations and sales manager, oversees the aesthetics and sales side. "Colette and I work very

well together. We each have a side and trust the other,” Chris said.

Growing up on job sites, Chris always knew he would follow in his family’s footsteps and become a builder. “My grandfather was a builder. My father was a builder. My mother was a builder. I’ve been around the construction business my whole life. I’ve never had another job.”

Colette, who had owned her own business before working in the mortgage department of World Savings Bank, joined Lancaster Homes in 2008 when the economy soured and Lancaster had to release all of its

Webster and Dickinson before transitioning to patio homes and then larger custom homes. “Now the focus is on ultra high-end homes in the city of Houston,” Chris said.

The Franzes agreed that they’re most proud their development of Candlelight Place, where they also live. “We build dream homes and build relationships at the same time. We’re friends with everybody,” Colette pointed out. “We’re here with a lot of young families,” she said, with Chris adding, “We’ve developed a real sense of community by being who we are. We have Halloween parties, block parties, Easter egg hunts and other gatherings.”



employees.

The only other employee currently is company CEO Eddie Franz, who started Lancaster Homes in 1974 with his now-deceased wife. “My dad is now 72 and semi-retired. He has 40 years of experience in the construction industry. That experience has transferred to our homebuyers in the form of cost savings, professional workmanship and affordability,” Chris said. Lancaster Homes originally produced tract homes in

They agreed that there is no other subdivision in Houston with the same dynamic as Candlelight Place, where neighbors know each other and kids play on the streets daily. “Everybody watches everybody’s back,” Chris said. One reason for the sense of safety is that it’s a secluded area with a suburbia feel that is close to the city. “People don’t know we exist,” he said. “We’re a hidden gem,” Colette added.

Chris said that their homes are in the \$700,000 to



having unique features. Three homes are available for immediate occupancy, and the Franzes plan to build more spec homes. “It’s good to have move-in-ready homes in this market,” Chris pointed out, because it takes six months to build a home from the time the slab is poured. With the design work, it can take up to a year to complete a home from the time a buyer approaches Lancaster Homes.

To maintain Candlelight Place’s visual symmetry, the Franzes exclusively use local architect Tom Pearson with Signature Design Group for the subdivision’s design work. Within the subdivision’s traditional appearance, each home still has its own unique style.

At the beginning of the building process, prospective buyers sit down with Tom, Chris and Colette to create the house plan. Colette asks the buyers for a wish list, which includes the elements they desire in a lot. Colette also works from a set list of questions to determine where the buyer wants key features, starting with simple elements and increasing in complexity. According to Chris they encourage buyers to look for pictures on Houzz.com and other places to provide ideas for their dream home.

\$900,000 range and that the average house in Candlelight Place is 4,000 to 4,800 square feet. “Our buyers are young professionals, often attorneys or in the oil industry, with new families.” They’re pleased that the subdivision is zoned for Oak Forest Elementary School, one of the top schools in Houston. Chris noted that the community is holding its value well. Sellers are making \$200,000 to \$250,000 in profit after two or three years of ownership.

Only 20 lots remain in Candlelight Place with each lot

“We encourage buyers to be part of the construction process” because they must make a lot of decisions, Chris said. “We give them a lot of options but try to steer them to the ones that keep them in their price range,” Colette added. “We’ve never said ‘no;’ we will do whatever they want, but we help guide them” so they can stay within their budget, Chris noted. “At the end of the day the buyer is truly involved with building his own home,” Chris stated.



Chris handles the “sticks and bricks” and cost elements of building a home, while Colette handles the interior design elements, taking the buyers to the design gallery. “Colette has good vision; she’s as good as an interior designer,” Chris said proudly. She added, “I can envision the design and layout clearly in my mind before it comes together.”

“We strive for perfection in building people’s dream homes. We never lose sight of that,” Chris stated. “There is no such thing as a perfect home, but there is such a thing as perfect customer service. We go above and beyond to take care of problems, taking a negative and turning it into a positive.”

The Franzes regularly expose their four-year-old son Cash to the building industry by taking him with them to work, just as Chris’ parents did. “In high school I was sweeping the streets around job sites. During college [at Southern Methodist University] I was the warranty guy when I came home for breaks, handling punch lists and fixing sheetrock.

“When I got out of college, all of my buddies had nice jobs. My dad handed me a broom. I was just a day laborer for a year and a half until I graduated to being a field superintendent. I worked my tail off. But that [experience] taught me accomplishment and pride in my job,” Chris noted.

Chris and Colette continue to have a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work. Their five-year plan includes developing another subdivision within Houston’s city limits because the city codes require maintaining certain standards and therefore level the playing field. They are looking for another building site in the Memorial or Spring Branch areas. They plan to focus on high-end custom homes, increasing their average price to the \$1-2 million range.

Chris and Colette Franz are putting their hearts and souls into the family business to make other families happy. The Lancaster Homes’ company motto, “It takes hands to build a house, but only hearts can build a home,” certainly fits their lives, too.



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