

Built to last

Millbury remodeling contractor celebrates 25 years in the interior renovation business

By Josh Farnsworth

With the sound of rock and blues emanating through a wooden barn just off North Main Street in Millbury, Mike Wackell carefully lays out a piece of crown molding. Several handcrafted pieces of wood have gone through his two hands, and thanks to an altered marketing strategy, several more will as well.

This Saturday, M. Wackell Interior Designs will celebrate 25 years in business as a remodeling contractor for home improvement projects.

“It has gone by in the blink of an eye,” Wackell said. Wackell, a 1979 graduate of Millbury High School, jumped around to different jobs when he was first out of school—all of which had him working with his hands. He spent time as a dry-waller, helped on construction projects, worked doing different odd jobs for his landlord, and spent time handling poly-clad laminates.

“You could probably have called me a handyman,” he said. “That is how I started out, and it just snowballed from there.”



Mike Wackell in his custom-made workshop. Photo/Josh Farnsworth

After gaining valuable knowledge in several hands-on fields, Wackell decided to tackle the challenge of opening his own interior renovations company. With a small advertisement and word of mouth, Wackell said he slowly, but surely started to build a customer base.

“His vision of things still blows me away,” said Mike’s wife, Diane Wackell, who works in his office on the company’s books. “He sees things differently than most, including myself, and that allows me to ask questions as a ‘typical client’ making a request.”

Wackell’s handiwork became so popular that for long stretches of time, clients would request to be put on a waiting list that was more than a year long.

“I had to start turning people away,” he said.

Having his wife work closely with him, Mike Wackell said he learned to make his business a listen-first operation.

“A lot of times you learn much from the client,” he said. “I really listen to a client and try to give the client what he or she wants. I believe it is important to go that extra mile and develop a relationship with the client.”

“I have a conscience that wants to do good,” he added. “I think that combined with listening creates a comfort level with the client.” Wackell said he can appreciate the need for a comfort level when working on projects that include the temporary takeover of a family’s kitchen or bathroom.

“It is a major disruption to their lives sometimes,” he said. “Ultimately, these people also have to live there and we try to make it as easy possible on them.”

To make the experience easier on his clients, Wackell said he goes to great lengths to ensure the workspace is left as clean as possible after the day’s work is done and stays in constant communication with clients in order to update the project’s progress.

Working from home, Wackell said he has been able to enjoy seeing his four children, Mike Jr., Alicia, Maegan, and Sophia more often than if he was at a distant office. Five years ago, he built the barn as a work area in order to organize the work more efficiently and unclutter his own living space.

“I was finding that I had little to no place for large amounts of plywood,” he said. “My workshop has been a godsend.”

With the economy in rough shape, Wackell admits to a drop-off in business lately. He has adjusted prices to fit the current market conditions, and performed four partial-bathroom renovations in the past four months after going nearly 25 years without doing even one.

“They may have just said we are in a recession, but those in the construction business know we have been in one for the past two years,” he said. “The phone does not ring quite as much, which is why marketing has become a key to success.”

“I know some guys in this industry who are not doing so well, unfortunately.”

Wackell said he believes one of the reasons he is still in business came from fighting his own stubbornness.

“I was one of those guys who said he would never, ever consider using a website for the business,” he said. “I caved in and now I am thankful I have one. Today, you cannot afford to *not* have one.”

As the Wackells prepare to celebrate the family business’s silver anniversary, Mike Wackell said he does not get too nostalgic about working milestones. He does, however, say he reflects from time to time about just how fortunate he is to work with his own two hands—and for no one but himself.

“I wake up and say that it is great having worked for myself for 25 years,” he said. “I cannot imagine having a boss ever again.”

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