



FROM ATLANTA TO TAMPA AND BACK AGAIN

By Daniel Downey

“To go back and see families, kids playing outside, is very rewarding. We build homes for families,” says Lou Steffens, Georgia Division President of Beazer Homes USA, Inc. “From planning the entrances, to the amenities, it is really neat to return and see how it all came together.”

After leaving Atlanta and nearly tripling growth in a struggling Tampa, Florida, market, Beazer’s CEO Ian McCarthy, asked Steffens to return to Atlanta and revive the sagging local market. The success of this revival is obvious, with a wide array of quality home options to meet the needs of a changing and diverse population.

The Georgia Division of Beazer Homes is offering more than just cookie-cutter homes; they are diversifying and offering homes with “higher and more appealing specification levels than other national builders.” From the “neo-traditional” single-family and carriage style homes to upscale townhomes and condominiums, Beazer Homes provides “the largest home-building market in the country” with one of the largest product selections of any Atlanta builder.

Beazer Homes, “operating as a family of local builders,” is a key player in the Atlanta building boom, from suburban development to urban renewal, and Lou Steffens guides much of this resurgence, spearheading the construction of in-town developments and active adult communities in and around metro Atlanta. What distinguishes Beazer Homes from other homebuilders, on a local and national level, is a commitment to excellence and an understanding of the community and its growth.

“We really do our homework before purchasing a new land deal. We are very research driven.” This research, claims Steffens, has led to a recent focus on infill communities. With plans to build in the next phase of the Atlantic Station re-development and Grant Park, Beazer is prepared to fill the need in increasingly popular urban areas. The operations team at Beazer Homes is dedicated to the communities they serve, focusing on site-specific exterior designs as well as changing regional interior design trends. Beazer Homes has recently added in-town and infill specialist, Christopher Jones, known for his work in the College Park area of metropolitan Atlanta, to the team of development specialists.



The divergence from the typical suburban development, a traditional market for national developers like Beazer, has led to the planning and construction of condos, live-work units, attached single family homes and town houses. With choices from the suburbs to the city, Beazer surely has a home plan to fit any need and any budget. Division President, Lou Steffens is also considering the development of mid-rise and high-rise complexes in the mid-town and upscale suburban areas. With market demands constantly changing, Beazer is poised to meet emerging needs. "We are focusing in existing markets as well as diversifying. Our philosophy is to serve the marketplace well by putting the customer first." Putting the customer first means catering to baby boomer and active adult populations. By offering a variety of floor plans, from multi-story condos to ranch style and two-story "master on main" homes, Beazer Homes caters to families just starting out and those just clearing out the nest.

Steffens expects to triple and even quadruple Beazer home sales in Georgia over the next few years. At the September 30th fiscal year end, their





results showed a forty percent increase in closings and revenue growth. Steffens, whose reputation in the building industry stems from the understanding and successful re-tooling of sluggish building markets, has received corporate approval to increase production to well over the 2000 unit mark. With a dedicated team of industry experts, those with “significant industry talent,” a superior product line, an established national supply network and the accountability of being a publicly traded corporation, this marked production increase doesn’t mean a sacrifice of standards.

“The Quality of Beazer homes exceeds other national competitors in the market place,” offers Steffens. “We hear this from customers all the time.” With an extensive customer service system in place and an acute focus on customer preferences and changing trends, the Georgia division of Beazer Homes offers customers more of what they want. “We spend lots of time designing and developing to fit buyer profiles and communities. We’ve

shifted, for example, from brass and oak to brushed chrome and maple, in response to changing regional trends.”

A response to regional and national trends also means embracing technology, which Beazer Homes has done with considerable assurance. Beazer was recently awarded a Builder 100 Top Technology Award for innovations both on and off site. And the National Sales and Marketing Council granted Beazer Homes the 2003 “Best Builder Website Award,” for their “mybeazerhome.com” site. “Forty percent of our customers,” claims Steffens, “said they look at the website before making a purchase. Capitalizing on the potential for excellence in web design functionality, and the expectations of the savvy “e-consumer,” Beazer Homes is definitely leaving its mark in the online community.

As the beazer.com website dots the digital landscape, Beazer homes are appearing in neighborhoods across metro Atlanta, and in

partnership with various charitable aid organizations. The national non-profit group, HomeAid America, and Beazer Homes, partnering locally and across the nation, have recently dedicated homes in Georgia. Other charities and organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, list Beazer Homes USA as an ally in the struggle to defeat homelessness and provide affordable housing. Beazer Metro, a charitable division of Beazer Homes, partners with local and state housing agencies across the United States to revitalize neighborhoods, by creating affordable living options for the nation’s most needy citizens. Steffens himself is a member of the board of directors for the Council for Quality Growth, whose mission it is “to promote the continued, balanced and responsible growth of Gwinnett County.” Beazer Homes is also a current member of the local Home Builder’s Association. “We like to stay active,” asserts Steffens, “and give back where we can.”

The involvement in the community does not stop with charities and new home construction. According to Steffens' plan, Beazer will become increasingly more active in the areas of preservation and redevelopment, with projects in historic Grant Park, College Park and Atlantic Station. By offering what they call neo-traditional homes, in Roswell, Georgia, and promoting carriage and estate living, in Cumming, Georgia, Beazer Homes already invites consumers to "discover that old town feeling." Now they are revitalizing what once might have been the "old town." The requirements of growth in historic and revitalized areas has led Beazer to focus as much on the exterior design of homes as the interior, paying particular attention to paint color, material and construction detail. "We work to make the outside schemes fit well in the surrounding neighborhood, to fit in with the existing structures." Beazer has worked, most recently, with preservationists and developers to answer the demands of the in town and infill markets. Acknowledging the consumer desire for energy efficiency, particularly in these infill markets, Steffens says that besides offering current options like "low-e" windows, they are working towards more earth-friendly products. This move towards energy-star rated homes is

one result of the ongoing and meticulous analysis of consumer need. According to Steffens, Beazer lends considerable credence to customer surveys; their checks and evaluations systems may well establish a new industry standard.

Beazer earns this reputation for quality customer service with each and every project. Each home, prior to closing, is subject to a "focus-walk," the Beazer Homes quality control punch-out. "We punch-out the home ourselves to one hundred percent before close," says Steffens, "and provide a comprehensive customer orientation as well. After that we offer a thirty day follow-up and a three and eleven month customer service call." With an extensive customer service tracking system in place, Beazer can monitor and replace faulty materials before they become problematic. From pre-sale to closing, Beazer Homes trusts communication and accessibility to meet and exceed the needs of their clients.

A high-profile web presence allows consumers to view and download brochures and floor plans and to preview community locations while dedicated staff members answer and direct questions generated



from the website, often from out of town buyers. Each Beazer community maintains model homes and a dedicated sales staff seven days a week to field the various enquiries. "We also partner with apartment complexes to develop rent/equity options, with part of the rent going towards a down payment [on a house]," says Steffens. A close and active relationship is also maintained with mortgage brokers and realtors, with the hosting of frequent brokerage events and presentations.





While utilizing some direct mail and advertising, the Georgia division of Beazer Homes relies heavily on word-of-mouth and a prominent regional profile. Steffens and his staff “put the customer first,” in every respect and it shows in the quality of the homes and the quality of their reputation.

The tide of resurgence has just begun for Georgia, and the corporate executives of Beazer Homes seem to be placing absolute faith in Lou Steffens’ ability to revive this sagging Atlanta market. As Beazer stands at the forefront of the infill and urban renewal markets, metropolitan Atlanta will undoubtedly feel the influential wave of Steffens and his team of industry innovators, as they set the standard for customer satisfaction and “raise the bar,” of client expectation. It is not difficult to envision Lou Steffens’ visits across Atlanta, as he returns to the scenes of his developments to revel in “how it all came together.”

—Daniel Downey
October 2004

