

FEATURE ARTICLE

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BCI Construction's *The Elms at Saratoga*

Story by Craig Stevens
 Photos by Randall Perry

*Nine Blocks from Broadway ...
 In the Beekman Street Art District area ...
 Unique, custom-built homes
 reminiscent of Olde Saratoga ...*

Add it all up, mix in a contractor's demonstrated commitment to quality and service and you have *The Elms at Saratoga*. The Elms is a custom home project of BCI Construction, Inc. and Prime Property Development, but more viscerally it is a project of impassioned vision for James and Natalie Amsler.

Jim Amsler, Vice President of BCI, is overseeing construction of *The Elms*. Jim brings a depth and breadth of knowledge and experience that stems from a 30-year career in commercial construction where high standards are required. "I am a get it done person. As a kid, I really wanted to be an architect but I eventually realized it wasn't really my thing. But I still loved building, putting things together. Give me an idea and I will put it together." In this case *The Elms of Saratoga* is the overarching idea and putting it together involves many individual ideas of his own.

While attending Hudson Valley Community College Jim started his career in the school's engineering department. He then began work as a part-time

structural draftsman and went on to hold responsible positions for large commercial contractors. In doing so he worked on projects across the country as far as California. Moreover, his familiarity with Saratoga Springs is a particular asset. His accomplishments in the Spa City include managing the construction of the three phases of Congress Park Centre, the Clubhouse at Saratoga National Golf Course and the Masie Center.

Jim has long wanted to build houses. As he says, "Building houses is different from commercial building. It is much more personal. And it is sort of like commercial design/build, which I love doing. I was excited about building where there can be sidewalks, people walking and talking and where there is a small town feel. This has been my vision for years."

Jim's wife Natalie would often travel with him during his journeys. She first worked in the financial industry and then the mortgage business. Later she was part of a major Capital Region homebuilder's sales force.

When *The Elms* project developed Natalie came on board to work along with BCI and Prime Development. She is involved

in all phases of the project from site coordination, vendor selections, building design, interior layouts and design, to marketing and sales. She had sensed that "People have a desire to be in Saratoga Springs in an old Saratoga-style home but were put off by costs and maintenance of an older home. So when The Elms of Saratoga was coming about we saw the opportunity to bring back old Saratoga."

Together the couple researched period architecture until they had preliminary designs in mind. Then they met with their architect, Syvertsen Architecture, to have their vision formalized on paper. As a result, Natalie says: "We are recreating historic style homes that will endure and become the *next* generation of old Saratoga homes. The construction is solid as a rock."

The first home debuted in the 2008 Saratoga Builders Association Showcase of Homes. Taking a maternal approach, Natalie says that for her completing it "was like giving birth."

THE QUIET NEW neighborhood is made up of 28 city lots. There are six footprints as starting points with "17 different facades that we *work from*," says Natalie, "and I emphasized *work from* because we fully customize by moving walls, columns [etc.]." The portfolio contains two-story, low-maintenance homes ranging in size from 1,953 sq. ft. to 2,482 sq. ft. — big enough for traditional families whose children can easily walk to Saratoga schools, yet small enough for individuals and empty-nesters to easily manage.

The homes are Energy Star® certified. High quality materials and superior craftsmanship abound throughout. It starts at the bottom where a superior waterproofing system provides protection from a home's worst enemy, moisture. Brick veneer protects and beautifies the exposed portion of the foundation. Old Saratoga-style porches provide seating space to view the carefully thought out streetscape. Hardiboard siding, high-end wood-clad windows and wide-board trim enrich and protect the exterior.

Inside there is stunning Brazilian hardwood flooring. In the model it contrasts dramatically with the white columns and crown molding. Three to four bedroom options include a master suite (first or second floor), formal entry foyer, gourmet kitchen, and fireplace in each design. Open floor plans with first-floor 10' ceilings and 8' doors provide a sense of spaciousness and Old World charm. Basement levels offer plenty of room to satisfy a resident's desire for one or more additional functional spaces: perhaps a family room, a home theater, a home office, a hobby area and certainly storage.

As an example of their attention to detail, Natalie and Jim personally select the extensive, classic wood trim from their supplier. Some vendors are drawn from BCI's established commercial resources. Others have been recruited for their expertise in meeting residential needs. "Our subs know our expectations and respect us for our standards," says Natalie.

NATALIE IS AT THE forefront in customer service and support from beginning to end. "When someone builds with us they are not dealing with different people for sales, design, contract and legal aspects, accounting, selections and building decisions. At every meeting from beginning to the time they take their keys and even afterward I will be present. ... Our customers have told us our personal approach has far exceeded expectations. We want our service to be as stress-free for the buyer as possible. It is true service — *not lip service* — because we back everything we say and do."

Heretofore, BCI Construction has been best known for its work in commercial development, construction and renovations across a wide spectrum. The company can and does function as a general contractor, construction manager and design/build contractor. Employing a work force of about 70 on average, the company performs its own site work, concrete work, and both rough and finish carpentry.

THE PRESIDENT OF BCI Construction, Inc. is Michael Benson, the company's founder. He joined with Prime Property Development, Inc. to develop the wooded, previously unappreciated extension of Elm Street as The Elms at Saratoga.

Within BCI's diverse portfolio are the visible achievements. The Halfmoon Water Treatment Plant, the Ducommun Aerostructures manufacturing facility, the Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys and the Atria Senior Living Center are examples. The Hollywood Brown Derby (a restaurant) in Albany is an example of building reuse: it had been the Salvation Army building. Residentially, the Loudon House Luxury Condominiums is a pending project. And imminent on the company's schedule is a 30,000 square foot office structure at the new Global Foundry in Malta.

Jim Amsler summarizes: "We want our customers to know that they are choosing to work with a solid builder/developer with both a history and a future."

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