

Serving the Building Industry for 30 Years

**Tommy Wright,
John Wright Construction Company**



By: Paige Reed

Thirty years ago Tommy Wright decided that it was time to become his own boss. After serving in the Navy, then working for Falcon Jet Corp for almost 15 years, Wright needed a break from what he calls his very own "rat race." Because he had married into a family that built and developed, the construction industry seemed like a perfect opportunity for him. In 1976 Wright's father-in-law helped with his first lot, beginning a business that is still growing today.

While working for Falcon Jet, Wright did some remodeling work on the side, which developed his appetite for construction. "I was convinced that building was what I wanted to do," said Wright. "I saved up some money to get into the business and started John Wright Construction Company." Learning to save money from the start is one reason that Wright feels he has been successful. According to him, the building industry has so many ups and downs that successful builders know to save money while it's good in order to maintain during the slow years. "Fortunately, I did that and have come through," said Wright. "Not a lot of builders have been able to stay in the industry for 30 years."

Over the last 30 years, Wright has built over 700 houses. He averages about 20 a year. "I had a couple of years where I built over 75 houses a year," said Wright. "That was not a good thing. It drove everybody crazy, so I backed off of that and now average 20 per year." Born and raised in North Little Rock, Wright stays close to home, building the majority of his homes in Maumelle. With partner, Jack Wilson of Woodhaven Homes, Wright continues to develop and build mainly in the Country Club of Arkansas, the fastest-growing community in Central Arkansas, according to Wright.

Photography by Christy Hollingshead Photography



This home builder's philosophy has been to build housing that a majority of people could afford. Because of the increased cost of materials and lots, Wright's philosophy has also become his greatest challenge. "Costs have gotten so high that affordable housing is now about \$175,000, and that is a little expensive for the average person to afford," said Wright. The fight to keep costs down is a constant battle, according to Wright, and he is always looking for other ways to save dollars, such as using new, innovative products that may be more reasonable while serving the same purpose in the home. "Although providing affordable housing is more of a challenge, I still feel like we're trying to accommodate the lower-priced home."

The best part about being a home builder, according to Wright, is the independence. "Of course being your own boss means that you can take off any time that you want to," laughed Wright, "but I don't believe I've ever had off more than a week in the last 10 years." In addition to the independence, Wright also noted that the most rewarding part of his job is when a home owner

picks up the phone to say thanks. "Builders don't get a lot of thanks, so it means so much when someone calls to say thank you for building them their home," said Wright. "The only person that can affirm that you've done good work is the home owner, so it means a lot when they say thanks for the house that you spent blood, sweat, and tears building."

The glue that holds Wright's business together is his wife, Marilyn. "She's very much a part of the construction," said Wright. Being a sounding board for his ideas, decorating, critiquing, and keeping Wright in line are just a few of Marilyn's duties. Wright attributes his success first to God, second to Marilyn. "God determines everyone's success. I feel like He's led me on the paths that I've taken," said Wright. "Of course, He's put me down a few times when I got out of hand; however, He's had His hand on us for the last 10-15 years, and I give Him all the glory. Secondly, I attribute my success to my wife."

While building is Wright's bread and butter, he also stays busy with other business ventures. The developing

At A Glance

Tommy Wright - John Wright Construction Company

Years as a Home Builder: 30 years

Advice for new builders:

Be on the job during as much of the process as possible.

Offices Held in Local Organizations:

Life Director of HBA-GLR and AHBA. Serves on several HBA committees on both local and state levels.

Hobbies:

Spending time at his cabin overlooking Greers Ferry Lake.

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business is one of those ventures. In addition to the Country Club of Arkansas, Wright is involved in Cypress Bay Development, which is currently developing Majestic Pointe with lots on the highest peak in Maumelle and views up to 25 miles. It will be available in the next four months. Wright's first development project was an affordable housing subdivision in North Little Rock called Sweet Rose Lane after his mother. The most economical house built there sold for \$37,500 in the early 80s. His least active business is Wright and Sons, a foundation repair company. They primarily do jobs only for other builders because, according to Wright, there is never enough time to focus on that business. In 1997 Wright started a company called Palarm Sand and Gravel, which manufactured sand and gravel out of a hillside, but the cost was so prohibitive that he backed off of that and sold the dirt to builders for their slabs. The Country Club Development bought out Wright's interest in Palarm, leaving Wright with time to focus on his newest venture, a construction waste management class four landfill. "I have been working on this landfill for five years now, and we just received our ADEQ certification," said Wright. "The landfill will only take construction waste, and it is located just inside Faulkner County by Palarm." Wright is





Carl Gray Henson



Bob Porto Builders



Bill Parkinson



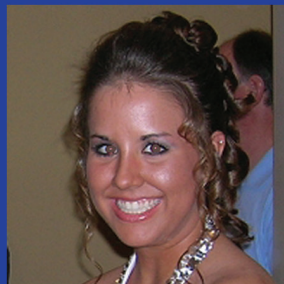
Lewis Home Builders

November is always a time that we as Americans, take time to give thanks for the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. Heather Porto and Caroline Parkinson are two very beautiful and special reasons why the Home Builders Association of Greater Little Rock chose Arkansas Children's Hospital to receive a majority of the proceeds from the Builders House of Hope project. The Rew Group of Arkansas honors these two young ladies and the builders who are making this gift possible.



Caroline Parkinson
Daughter of Builder
Bill Parkinson

Former Patients at Arkansas Children's Hospital



Heather Porto
Daughter of Builder
Bob Porto

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also a Life Director of the local and state Home Builders Associations (HBA), which means that he has served 10 years as a regular director and is now a permanent fixture in the HBA. He currently sits on several HBA committees on both the local and state levels.

The key to handling all of these many projects, according to Wright, is to have a good partner. "That takes some of the heat and the work load off of you because it is impossible to do it all," said Wright. He is able to rely on his daughter and son-in-law, Donna and Mike Brown, because they do most of the construction, and Wright is able to be an overseer. Wright also mentioned the need for having good employees when juggling so many projects.

Wright would advise small builders that are just getting their start to be on the job during as much of the building process as possible. "A builder can't let his subs do work without his knowledge. He needs to make the decisions on the job so that he learns and doesn't let someone else make a decision that could come back to hurt him," said Wright. "For example, footings – anyone can dig a hole, but actually seeing the soil and the conditions with your own eyes can make a difference."

According to Wright, the future for home building in Arkansas is on the verge of something big. "Back in the 1980s, I attended a home builders convention in Houston, Texas, and they named five cities where there would be a housing boom. One of those was Little Rock," said Wright. "I personally believe that it is starting now in Little Rock. We've had a housing boom in Northwest Arkansas, and that boom is appearing to slow down. However, I don't think the boom in Central Arkansas has happened, and I feel like it's on the verge of starting." Wright also noted that the housing downturn is really only

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applicable in houses in the \$300K and above range and that it is slight, not extreme. Houses in the \$200-300K range are still in need, according to Wright. He attributed the alleged slowdown to the fact that people are hearing so much about the housing downturn on the news that they are more reluctant to buy. However, Wright noted that because rates have gone down, there's no reason for people not to buy.

When not building, Wright enjoys spending time at his cabin on Greers Ferry Lake. "I go every weekend," said Wright. "All I have to do is get on the interstate and forget

about building...except for the phone ringing. But to be honest, I've sold many houses while on my deck overlooking the lake." His cabin is a fixer-upper that Wright purchased a couple of years ago, and he enjoys piddling with it every chance he gets.

In the future Wright hopes to continue developing and getting the construction waste management landfill up and running successfully. After that, he plans to try to slow down. Wright is one Arkansas builder that has given much to his trade, the construction industry, for the last 30 years. 🏠

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