

# Business

# BUZZ

**A**n unusual discovery was made during the height of the Great Depression of the 1930s: the companies that focused on quality – from movie studios to major manufacturers – kept busy. Why? When American consumers make important financial decisions during tough times, they are almost always drawn to a quality product or service as the wisest economic choice. Quality doesn't always mean the most expensive decision, but it does reflect the very best in intention, effort, inspiration, and skill. Quality means products that last for years and work that can stand the test of time.

Six creative forces in Our Town – **Scott Bickford, Bernie Madden, Steve Reiff, Reed Dillon, Jerry Fleenor, and Marc Lonesk** – are not only friends and community leaders but share a vision that hasn't wavered during their many years in business. All six businessmen believe in the importance of quality, in developing solid relationships with their clients through trust and satisfaction, in building reputations based on years of experience, knowledge, diplomacy, and the art of putting their clientele's needs first.

*The Independent* takes great pleasure to introduce our readers to six very important movers-and-shakers in Our Town's home design-and-improvement community: Scott Bickford of the R.S. Bickford & Company architectural firm; Bernie Madden of Madden-McFarland Interiors; Steve Reiff of Great Plains Pool & Spa Products; landscape architect Reed Dillon of Reed Dillon & Associates; Jerry Fleenor of Bordner Installation Group; and Marc Lonesk of Sturgis Materials, Inc.

Each of these six men bring decades of hands-on experience to each project. Is it any wonder they each agree with the famous opinion of the philosopher Aristotle: "Quality is not an act, it is a habit."

The habit of quality can be best illustrated by a company's reputation. Bordner Installation Group's 23-year tradition of roofing, siding and window and stucco installation work stands on the fact that more than 75 percent of all new business comes from referrals from past customers. In nearly a quarter century in business, Bordner has never had a customer complaint filed with the Better Business Bureau.

"In this business, our reputation for quality isn't just an important facet of our way of doing business," said Jerry Fleenor, "it's the most important thing."

If you want to know about Bernie Madden's devotion to quality, ask his clients. "We work very hard on selecting the finest products, having the best delivery and the best follow-up. That's what quality is all about," said Bernie, who began his career more than four decades ago working for the legendary William Volker Company – for many years the *ne plus ultra* for home furnishings and appointments in the region. That job started Bernie's training in understanding not only the importance of quality in selling home furnishings, but the art of educating his clients on the same subject.

"There is still a romance to selling fine furniture. Our clients like to know how the furniture is designed and built and finished. Though many of today's customers prefer a more casual lifestyle with slightly relaxed furnishings, they still appreciate quality craftsmanship in their home."

In 1975, Bernie Madden purchased the long-established Gene E. McFarland design firm and added his name to the company. Tastes have changed during the last 35 years, agrees Bernie Madden, but quality never goes out of style.

For Marc Lonesk of Sturgis Rock Solid Solutions, his firm's 60-year reputation for quality is paramount to its success as a leader in providing building materials to local builders and homeowners. In Our Town, Marc likes to point out, the finest building materials – stone from all over the United States – are necessary for this region's unique weather conditions, including intense freeze-thaw conditions, on stone walls, patios and building projects. If his clients want stone for their products, Marc is well-versed in establishing a synergistic relationship between a designer, a stonemason and the ultimate end user. What his company excels in is the ability to capture a client's vision and then, utilizing his network of resources, achieve an outcome that not only brings that vision to a beautiful reality but has lasting value that withstands the test of time.

Marc's knowledge of stone is also a major selling point for clients, who find comfort in dealing with a local company owner who literally understands his product line from the quarry to delivery.

Unlike his friends who deal directly with consumers, Steve Reiff, founder and



Marc Lonesk, Sturgis Materials; Reed Dillon, Reed Dillon & Associates; Scott Bickford, R.S. Bickford & Company; Bernie Madden, Madden-McFarland Interiors; Jerry Fleenor, Bordner Installation Group; and Steve Reiff, Great Plains Pool & Spa Products

owner of Great Plains Pool & Spa Products, sells products to the builders and service professionals who, in turn, work with the public.

"But that makes the reputation for quality even more important for us," said Steve. "The understanding that our clients are getting a quality product gives them confidence in dealing with their clients. We believe in offering good materials and standing behind them. It's a solid business model that's been around for a hundred years."

More than 100 years ago, critic John Ruskin wrote, "There is hardly anything in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper."

It takes a strong commitment to maintain a reputation for quality, particularly when rival businesses begin offering cheaper and, sometimes, inferior products or offering less attention to quality service. Architect Scott Bickford believes that no matter what ups and downs are in this economic climate, quality is still the driving force that motivates clients into making important decisions. "Quality still has real meaning," Scott said. "It's what inspires me to always do the best job I can for all of my clients."

Quality is so vital to the work of landscape architect Reed Dillon of Lawrence that the word is a recurring theme on the website for Reed Dillon & Associates: quality products, quality installation and quality control.

"The idea of quality is very important to me, both in my business and in my personal life," said Reed. "So much of our business comes from referrals: from clients who have seen my work or have heard about our reputation for detail. My relationships with my clients are very one-on-one." Reed works closely with each client, creating the landscaping design to their specifications and personally places each plant. "That's what clients want to know," he said. "They want the confidence

*"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives."*

– WILLIAM A. FOSTER

that they're receiving the highest level of design and attentiveness of service."

"There's a great satisfaction that comes from pleasing your clients," Reed said. "I think that's an important facet of quality."

Each of the six businessmen working in Our Town complement each other, and although they differ in their areas of home design and improvements, take heart from the famous quote by the late football coach Vincent Lombardi: "The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor."

No matter what each of these men do, it must be the best. Their reputations in the community demands no less.