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Ste. Marie's Home Builders
The People's Builder



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By Katie Keefe Smith

Mark and Cindy Ste. Marie's home isn't oversized, isn't secluded behind a solid brick fence, isn't flanked by acres of open green space and bending oaks. In fact, from the curb, their house looks very much like the one to the right and to the left—modern, fresh, and inviting. That's because the house to the right and to the left were also built by Mark Ste. Marie.

"When I told friends in the industry I was going to build my new home in a Broussard subdivision I'd played a big part in getting off the ground, they told me I was crazy. They said I didn't want

to be that close, that available to my homeowners," he laughs. Then, leaning closer, Mark confides, "But that's exactly why I wanted to live here. If something happens in one of my houses, I pick up my toolbox and the problem's solved. I *want* people to know where I am."

And just like that, Mark Ste. Marie went from any other builder to the People's Builder.

"I'm from Here"

In his tenth year of business, Mark Ste. Marie himself is no stranger to

other contractors in the area or to many of the homeowners who've chosen to live in his houses. "I'm from here," he says. "It makes sense that I would want to build here."

In Mark's case, it helps to clarify what "from here" means. Valsin Broussard, founder of the city that bears his name, is Mark's great great grandfather. Mark is one of seven children who have, as he puts it, "worked, played, and prayed" in Broussard and Acadiana all of their lives. He attended public schools in Broussard and Lafayette. "I went to St. Cecilia for a couple years too, but even-

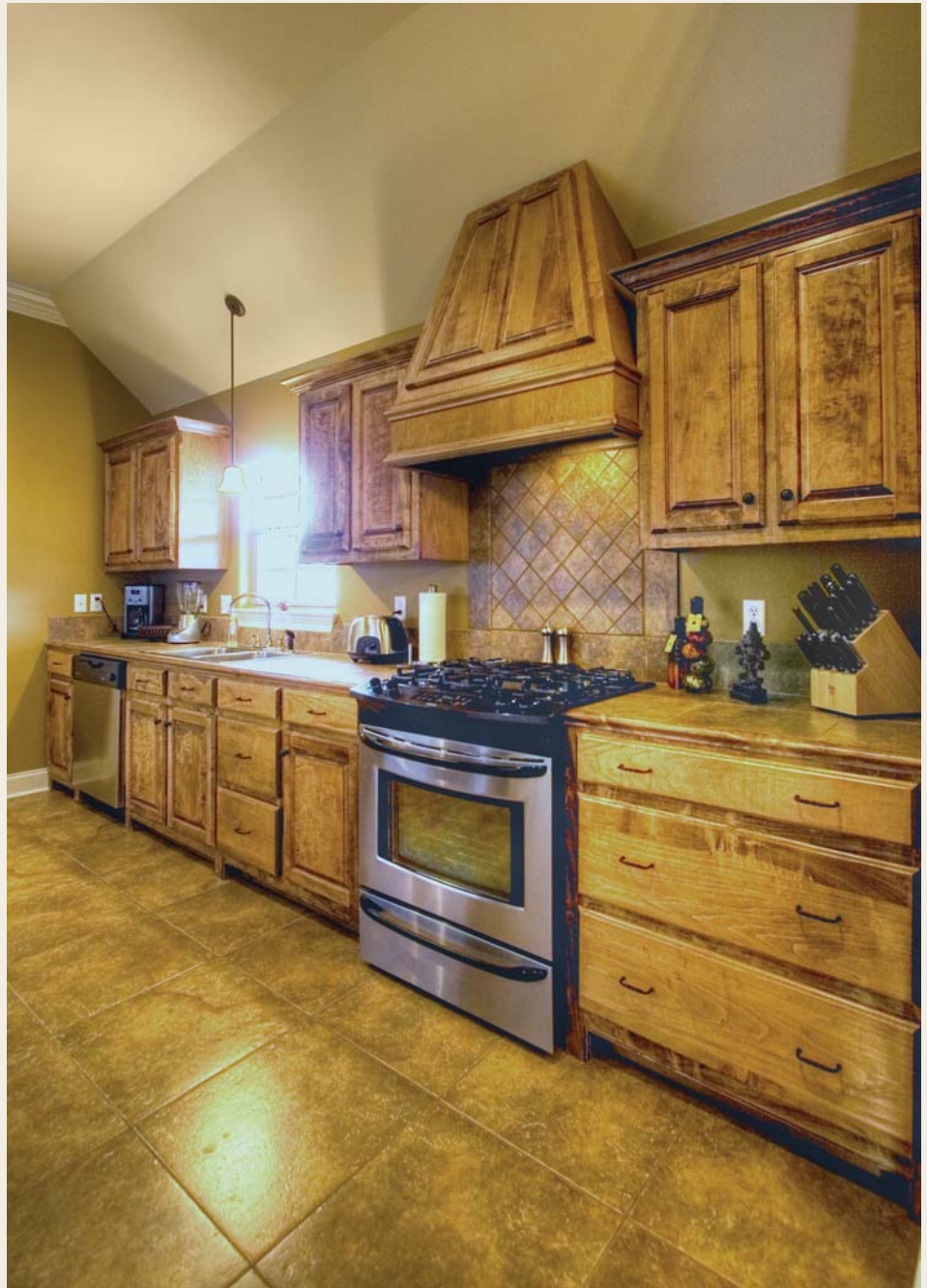


tually the nuns patted me on the back and told me ‘Mark, you really belong in the public school system,’ he laughs, “which was fine with me because I wanted to play in the band.” But that wasn’t all Mark wanted to do.

Practical Experience

After graduating from high school, Mark pursued another love, carpentry. “From a very young age I worked with my Uncle Joe, L.D. Bernard, in his shop. He was a master craftsman. He had passion and he wanted his work to help the community,” says Mark. In fact, much of the woodwork in St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Broussard was crafted by Bernard. “I wanted to be like him, so I went to trade school and became a carpenter.”

Mark’s homeowners benefit from his first hand knowledge of carpentry. “I know what’s right, what’s going to last,” he says, “and I insist that’s what my homeowners get.” But his practical experience extends far beyond wood-working. He also operated his own one-man roofing company. And for 15 years he worked in the oil industry for Baker Hughes. “I spent 10 of those years living overseas. I’ve been to 15 countries and 5 continents. It taught



me a lot about how much we have here in America, how much we take for granted. When I finish a home,” he explains, “I look at my homeowner and say, ‘You’ve got a beautiful home here.’ And I mean it.”

Family-Friendly Construction

In fact, Mark went into building not just to construct beautiful homes, but to create family-centered communities. “Even before I get started with a project, I think about how it’s going to

play into the larger development,” he says. “Most of my homes have been built in the Broussard and Youngsville areas. I remember what the founders of those cities wanted—safe streets, family-centered neighborhoods, and positive growth.” Mark works to contribute to those ends.

His homes, mostly spec houses ranging from 1350-2500 square feet, are built with families in mind. “I sit down and create the designs myself. I make sure there isn’t a foot of wasted space,”



Continued from Page 7

he says. “When you’re creative with the floor plan, a home that is relatively small, say 1600 square feet, feels much larger. People are often very surprised when I tell them the actual square footage of my homes. They always think they’re larger.”

Ste. Marie homes are in such demand that Mark hasn’t had the opportunity to use a realtor in three years. “My marketing is really high tech,” he chuckles. “I put a sign up at the beginning of the job saying this is a Ste. Marie Homebuilders project and inter-

ested buyers stop me and ask to look around. It lets me know I’m doing a good job, and that’s very important to me.” His face becomes more serious, “I think my homeowners understand that I get it—I’m not building houses; I’m building their future homes. This is the most important investment they’ll probably make in a lifetime, and I take that responsibility seriously. Quality is standard procedure.”

Quality Is Standard Procedure

And it shows. Mark puts effort into

the detail, “the art,” of his houses. “I start with curb appeal. I use a mortar wash on the brick outside to create a textured, old-world look.” He adds keystone headways to bring out the windows. And he’s recently developed a new system to make his shutters more practical and more appealing. By mounting brackets to the inner walls of a house rather than the brick outside, he creates a shutter with a hinge, one that will open and close as needed. “Functional shutters allow people protection during hurricanes and storms,” Mark explains. An additional safety benefit is a latch located on the inside of the shutter. It allows residents to open the shutter from inside the house if they need to escape during a flood. Mark has also equipped Caribbean shutters with a mechanism that allows them to be completely detached from the window and hung on the side of the garage. “It allows more light into the house, and it gives people style options—that’s important to them,” he says.

He’s also attentive to the paint techniques used in his homes. Ste. Marie homes come standard with triple sand finishes. “People notice the difference,” he says. Other “standards”: bull nose corners, generous archways, stainless steel appliances, intricate



mantles, smooth doors, top-of-the-line wood, ceramic and carpet flooring, and unique niches in the wall to ensure each home is distinct. Mark's goal is to make his spec homes feel as if they were custom built.

"I get ideas about new ways to do things at two in the morning," he confesses. "Sometimes, I just can't sleep." His wife, Cindy, who recently joined Ste. Marie Homebuilders fulltime adds, "He's not kidding about the ideas in the middle of the night. I often have to tell him, Mark, go back to bed."

Cindy's addition as fulltime partner of the Ste. Marie Homebuilders' team is another advantage for customers. "She helps them select their bricks, choose paint colors, make cabinetry decisions, all the details of a home—she's the real brains behind the operation," says Mark. Cindy also handles the bookkeeping and keeps careful track of

design selections used in each of the houses. "We have a database that allows us to access everything we do in our homes, from paint color in the third bedroom to light fixtures in the second bathroom. It benefits the current buyer and any potential customers who want to know what we've done before," explains Mark.

Consolidating Construction Costs

It's possible that drive to go above and beyond, that commitment to his customers, is what makes Ste. Marie Homebuilders unique. Mark explains, "I'm always looking for ways to turn out the best possible product at the lowest possible price for my homeowners. One of the ways I do that is by concentrating my projects in one area at a time. That way not only do I save on port-o-let and dump trailer costs, I use my subs more efficiently and I'm able

PROVEN CHARACTER

Mark Ste. Marie credits his life experiences with molding him into the builder he is today. He values discipline, integrity, passion, and service.

- Mark was awarded the Carnegie Medal in 1995 for pulling a victim from a burning vehicle. The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, established by Pittsburgh steelmaker Andrew Carnegie in 1904, recognizes acts of civilian heroism. Mark believes we all can make a difference.

- In 1998, Mark earned the title Outstanding Fighter in Open Division boxing in the state of Louisiana. He was a three time state Golden Glove champion and six time AAU state champion. Mark credits boxing for molding him into a person of discipline and passion.

- At age 22, Mark became the youngest elected councilman in the city of Broussard. In 2006, he made a run for mayor. Mark believes he has an obligation to give back to the community that has helped mold him into what he is today.





Continued from Page 9

to be right there, at any job, right away.” When a home is finished, Mark passes those savings onto his buyers. “I get so many people thanking me for saving them an additional two to three thousand dollars,” he says, “but I’m

just doing business the way I believe it should be done.”

When Customers Become Friends

It’s not hard to discover that people who buy his houses appreciate his

efforts. A shadow falls across the living room floor and Mark turns to see who’s passed outside. His next door neighbor is busy fertilizing the front lawn. When pressed for an explanation, Mark chuckles, “Carl doesn’t let me cut the grass. He says it’s because my riding lawn mower never gets the lines right...” Mark doesn’t quite finish his thought. He doesn’t have to. It’s clear there’s a lot more than sloppy grass lines prompting Carl, once customer/now friend, to volunteer for Saturday morning lawn duty—it’s called gratitude. And apparently, in this builder’s Broussard subdivision, and in the other subdivisions dotted by Ste. Marie homes, there’s plenty to go around. Mark Ste. Marie is building a reputation as a peddler of houses who cares about homeowners most of all. For more information or to contact Mark Ste. Marie call 337.654.4550.



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