

March 16, 2007

Woman building dreams for those seeking affordable housing

BYLINE: BILL CHURCH BJ contributor

What started as the purchase of an Okeechobee County weekend family retreat has turned into a whole new career for a former marketer and advertising woman from Jupiter.

Stephanie Scambler Young and her husband, Greg, have been partners in Young Development Co. for most of their now 18-year marriage. The company remodeled and built in both the residential and commercial markets, but three years ago Greg decided to build only in the commercial sector and joined with a partner in a new firm.

An advocate for affordable housing, Stephanie jumped at the chance to take Young Development into that market as a woman home builder in the male-dominated construction field.

She began buying individual lots in Okeechobee County where the couple had owned property for more than 12 years to use as a country getaway for their two sons. With six houses now complete and four more soon to come, Young is already looking for land to hold a small development of five to 10 new homes.

All her houses sell for \$200,000 and below. Why did she choose this niche rather than building more profitable luxury homes?

"The buyers are very appreciative," Young said. "For some, it's their first home. There's a need as well as a market."

She insists on keeping quality in the homes she builds, a tall order at the lower prices she charges.

"I give up a little of my profit," Young said. "It doesn't cost that much more to build quality. I'm not doing this to get rich. I get satisfaction."

Young hires all her subcontractors from Okeechobee County, believing that's the right thing to do to serve the local community. She pays them quickly so they can make their payrolls. Working with predominantly male crews has also presented few if any problems according to Young, who said she was raised to treat men and women with equal respect.

"I work with great people," Young said. "I'm loyal to them and they to me."

Young is personally involved on site at least four days a week and is always in contact. She credits her early success to her skills in keeping all the trades working together. Everything in home building has to be done in order, and the project can fall behind if subcontractors get held up for a day or two.

Young cites her recent accomplishment of pouring two slabs in November and collecting certificates of occupancy just 13 weeks later.

"I'm a problem solver," Young said. "I make things work."

Problems like the theft of more than \$4,000 worth of electric wiring stripped from one of her houses still lacking the drywall.

Young learned building first from her dad, a schoolteacher who built houses on the side to earn extra money. He had always been a handyman. She picked up more knowledge from her husband, who has a degree in finance but elected to get his general contractors license and resume a love of construction first nurtured in his high school and college days.

She will soon go for her certified builder's license, adequate for construction of structures no higher than three floors. Until then, her general contractor husband signs off on the work.

Young is a native of northern Palm Beach County and a Jupiter High School graduate. She attended Palm Beach Community College and Florida State University before earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in Marketing from Florida Atlantic University.

With a desire to get into real estate development, Young attended law school for a year before starting Scambler and Associates, a marketing and boutique advertising agency with leisure and hotel clients, and then a specialty in marketing for shopping centers. Following the birth of sons Austin and Bradley, now both teenagers, she kept just a few clients before joining her husband in Young Development.

And now, she makes the long commute from Jupiter to Okeechobee to oversee her own home building projects.

"I enjoy the satisfaction of seeing something I built and knowing it will be there for many years," Young said.

Copyright, 2008, Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers, Used here with permission. No additional reproduction or distribution of this article in any form is permitted without the written approval of Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers (<http://www.tcpalm.com>).