

High-end homebuilder D'Agostino caters to customers' needs

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David D'Agostino has no plans to become a large-scale, 100 homes-a-year builder. Instead, his eponymous building company based in Strafford, PA., builds two to three housing developments a year. "We try to keep it that way," he says. "We can deal with homeowners and get to know them."

Having started his career as an employee of his father's company, D'Agostino remembers catching the building bug as early as high school. "Building was just something I grew up with. As a teenager, I worked in the trades, framing houses, doing interior trim, laboring on the jobs and then later, working during college as a superintendent. There was always the reward of watching a finished product emerge from a piece of ground, becoming a home and, in a lot of cases, a development of many homes."

In the 1990s, D'Agostino and his father, Anthony "Sonny" D'Agostino, collaborated on some joint ventures before he established his own company in 2000.

The majority of D'Agostino homes are high-end, ranging from \$550,000 for carriage and townhomes to up to \$2 million for a large house. Newly completed developments include the 18-home Springton Reserve in Newtown Square, the carriage houses at Overlook at Palmers Mill in Media, and the Yellow Springs Estates community at the base of the Valley Forge Mountain in Chester County. Most recently, the company broke ground on a 27-acre expanse for an 11-lot subdivision in Chester Springs called Fox Meadow, with homes ranging from \$900,000 to over \$1 million. A few more communities in the region are in the works for 2007.

As a high-end builder, D'Agostino knows all of his customers and often meets with them face-to-face during the various phases of planning their homes. "If it's not me, then it's my project manager," he says. With seven employees in the company, the D'Agostino customer is never anonymous. D'Agostino lives in one of his own developments, as it is important to him to see his customers and continue to interact with them.

It's the personal interaction that allows D'Agostino to keep his homes distinct. He likes that he can give his customers the ability to participate in the design of their homes while sparing them the expense of hiring an architect. "I'm not going to reinvent the wheel, but after 20 years in the business I have something that will fit you." He notes that in Yellow Springs that same model was customized to the extent that none of the houses look the same, from the façade to details like tray ceilings, crown moldings and wainscoting.

Offer catering to his customers' needs means going beyond the usual offered options to fit their particular circumstances. Years ago, one homeowner asked him for a built-in cooktop, which he constructed out of plaster and stone. "Someone will say, 'I have five kids and I want a locker area,' or 'I need a bigger island,' so we design it into the plan." he says. "We try to explore every possibility."