

# Custom Home

The Art and Craft of Custom Home Building / July/August 2011

## 2011 Pacesetters

Diversifying In a Down Economy

hanley wood

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Known for celebrating sustainable, local resources, South Mountain Company sourced some prominent materials directly from the Duarte's Pond site.



# Talli Oxnam and RJ Cooper

Diversification Strategy: Launching a services division.

2011 Pacesetter Awards



No matter how well a house is built, it still needs tending over the years. Hinges grow squeaky, hardwood floors scratch, paint requires touching up. After receiving constant requests from past clients to take care of such issues, the custom building and remodeling company ILEX Construction & Woodworking decided to launch a services division called ILEX Services. Now five years old, ILEX Services handles everything from refinishing furniture and repairing porch steps to rebuilding a deck or replacing a home's windows. "Often, once we're there, the clients think of more things they need us to do," says ILEX COO Talli Oxnam. "You're there for a few days and can make a big difference."

The Mid-Atlantic-based company's timing—it started ILEX Services just before the downturn—was impeccable. "It's helped us weather the storm," Oxnam says. Because the services division's projects tend to be short-term, they provide a good scheduling plug-in for downtime in between larger jobs. Past clients enjoy having ILEX available to them for smaller projects, and some new-home or remodeling clients now make their first contact with the company through ILEX Services. "That way, they get to try us out," Oxnam says.



Many of ILEX Construction & Woodworking's projects, such as a custom home designed by Barnes Vanze Architects (above) and remodels by Stoneking/ von Storch Architects (far left) and Johnson|Berman (left), end up being maintained by ILEX Services, at the homeowners' request.

ILEX Construction & Woodworking / Baltimore; Charlottesville, Va.; Easton, Md.; Middleburg, Va.; Hot Springs, Va.; and Washington, D.C. / [www.ilexconstruction.com](http://www.ilexconstruction.com) / Years in business: 25 / Employees: 80 / 2010 volume: Withheld / 2010 starts: 18 / Years of operation for the services division: 5

As company president RJ Cooper points out, doing small and maintenance jobs keeps work interesting for ILEX's employees. "It's good for them to get around and learn different things, as opposed to just doing one thing," he says. Staff members easily move back and forth between the services division and the company's other areas of expertise. Also, Cooper, Oxnam, and their team like to promote green building practices, and the services division gives them another avenue to do so. If a client wants to replace his or her windows, for example, the company gains an opportunity to recommend and install energy-efficient windows.

Oxnam says ease of communication has been a key to ILEX Services' success. An online portal on the main ILEX website allows potential clients to contact the services division quickly and easily. A toll-free number, direct-dial and cellphone numbers for project managers, and quick e-mail responses also facilitate back-and-forth with clients. "My biggest thing is to always follow through, especially with the services division," Cooper says. "If I say I'll meet you there at 1 p.m., I'll be there at 1 p.m. You'll get more mileage if you do what you say you're going to do."—*M.D.*