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The Buck Stops Here



WITH AN EXPERIENCED DESIGN-BUILD FIRM LIKE

GEHMAN DESIGN REMODELING, HOMEOWNERS GET A PROVEN PARTNER

THAT CAN HANDLE EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR RENOVATION ON TIME AND ON BUDGET.

Because home-construction projects usually involve so many moving parts, communication and collaboration are vital to the process. When one or both are absent, the entire plan can get thrown off track. Dennis Gehman, MCR, has seen it happen all too often during his many years in the industry, particularly when architects and builders who lack a shared history or don't work for the same company are forced to come together.

Their end goal might be the same, but the vision is not.

"Most tradespeople aren't used to having an architect or a designer watch over their shoulder, and I think sometimes that's

where the rub can come in," says Gehman, the owner and founder of Gehman Design Remodeling, based in Harleysville. "In construction, there is almost always more than one way to get to the end result. Many times, how you get there doesn't matter, as long as it looks like it's supposed to and functions the way that it should in the end. But some people have very strong ideas about that, and it can lead to them butting heads."

When Gehman started his own design-build firm more than three decades ago, he not only wanted honesty and integrity to be cornerstones of the company, but he also sought to instill the aspects of teamwork

he had learned while coming up through the ranks. All these years later, both the efficient approach and the professional demeanor of the team continue to make Gehman Design Remodeling an in-demand contractor for projects of all sizes, from kitchen and bathroom makeovers to finished basements and even large-scale additions.

"As I always tell people, nobody here is an island; we're not just working on a project by ourselves," he says. "There might be one person who has contact with the client, but there's a whole team that's working on it behind the scenes and we're bouncing ideas off each other. One of the big benefits is that as we're coming up

with designs, we're always asking the question: How are we going to build this? Chances are we can build anything, but sometimes just a little tweak can make it easier to build, which in turn should be better on the budget for the client."

Other advantages to hiring a design-build firm like Gehman Design Remodeling are its ability to control the timeline without waiting for subcontractors to finish certain aspects of the job, and having one project manager who is onsite every day from start until finish. That project manager is also a tradesperson doing the actual work, and can communicate daily with the client about the progress.

"We're a one-stop shop with professionals in all of the various aspects, from design to the trades to project management," Gehman says. "The buck all stops with our company, so if things aren't going right we can't point the finger at someone else. Our job during the design phase is to ask a lot of questions to understand what kind of space or outcome the clients want, so that we can help them achieve that."

Another way that the company stands out from its competitors is its affiliation with the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, or NARI. In addition to Gehman's Master Certified Remodeler designation, six other members of the team have certifications that have required them to take a course, pass a test, and undergo additional continuing education each year.

NARI also has an ethics committee that allows homeowners to file a grievance with its members. Doing so provides additional accountability that non-member contractors do not have to abide by.

"Unfortunately, Pennsylvania doesn't have much control over contractors," Gehman says. "There is contractor registration, but anybody can go online, sign up, and become a registered contractor this afternoon. It's not expensive and it's not hard to do. We as a business want to be on top of new trends and more efficient ways to build, and part of that is energy efficiency and reducing waste. So being



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part of NARI and having access to continuing education is very important."

Kitchen and bath renovations continue to be popular projects for homeowners. Gehman has also seen a significant increase in requests for additions to accommodate multiple generations living under the same roof. Instead of having an elderly relative move into a retirement community, many homeowners choose to alter their homes in ways that enable their older family members to stay safely with them.

Gehman Design Remodeling is also happy to complete smaller jobs, especially for its many repeat customers. One of the current projects involves the installation of a new roof on a client's vacation home; Gehman is grateful to have been asked to do the work even though it's not a design-build job.

Other times, the team will find easier solutions to a client's problem than that

homeowner might have expected. For example, a longtime client from Schwenksville recently asked the company to refinish a double-front door, which the company had installed years ago. When a manager went to inspect it, he discovered that it required little more than a thorough cleaning.

"That's going to save them a few thousands dollars, and to me it's the right thing to do," Gehman says. "We could have kept our mouths shut, stripped the door, and refinished it, but it's not necessary. Good things come around, and when you treat people the way that you should, they're thankful." ■

Gehman Design Remodeling

PA-297 | 355 Main Street | Harleysville, PA 19438
(215) 513-0300 | GehmanRemodeling.com