

Building as a family affair

Attention to detail pays off for the Leonhard brothers

By Michael Smyth
Press Correspondent

Doors do more than contain heat, repel storms and wear Christmas wreaths. As the eyes are the windows of the soul, the front door of a house tells much about what is behind it.

The front door at 1419 N. 31st Street has an arched window with pieces of etched and beveled glass held together by brass leading. A floral arrangement, composed of more cut and polished pieces, sits in the middle. The sidelight next to the door has an arched window rendered in the same expensive materials. The latch and hinges are solid brass. At \$2000, this front door bespeaks quality and promises more inside.

Leonhard's Building Service Inc., 1730 N. 11th Street, is a quality outfit. Inside the house they built on N. 31st one finds a hardwood floor with boards in a distinctive pattern. Cletus Leonhard explains that such a unique floor, like others they have done, some in a herringbone design, requires accuracy and a big investment in time.

The fireplace and chimney are masonry from the foundation to the top. The kitchen cabinets are custom made to fit odd angles and include a hexagonal island. Unlike manufactured cabinets, there are no wasteful three inch filler strips. "We use every inch of space," says brother Steve.

In their shop, they have made cabinets of many unusual shapes and sizes, doors with leaded glass and even moldings to match those found in old houses.

The master bathroom has a Jacuzzi whirlpool with ceramic tile surround. The walls have new high density insulation which is 10 percent more effective. Underneath it all is APA (American Plywood Association) rated plywood, used with glue and oversized floor joists to provide a rock solid house. Cletus proudly says, "you won't find a squeak in this house."

For using APA products and

recommended methods, designed to exceed building code requirements and create a superior structure, Leonhard's Building Service will be listed in "Better Homes and Gardens Building Ideas" for the second year in a row.

Cletus, Steve and brother Jake love challenges so it is not surprising that more of their work is in remodeling than new construction. Matching additions, both cosmetically and structurally, to existing structures is not a consideration in new home construction. It presents some unique situations.

The owners of an Elkhart Lake cottage wanted to enlarge and also wanted the existing crawl space replaced with a full-size basement. Since crawl spaces are under houses, the house had to be raised. In winter, steel I-beams were brought by truck across the frozen lake and slid up the icy bank and under the existing cottage to support it. Heaters were used to thaw the earth and air hammers used to break it apart. Until the new basement was in place, the cottage weathered winter storms, perched on cribbing (crosshatched timbers) and I-beams.

The Leonhard brothers were in Elkhart Lake on various jobs for two years. Most of their work comes from repeat business and word of mouth. "Usually when we get into a neighborhood, we have a hard time leaving," says Cletus.

The owners of a different Elkhart Lake job lived in Colorado. The brothers like to keep their clients involved since it is easier to make changes along the way than at the end. Consequently, the client from Colorado flew in regularly, with his architect, to confer on site at Elkhart Lake.

For this job, they manufactured root trusses on the floor of their shop and then disassembled each truss into three sections, for shipment to Elkhart Lake where they were reassembled and installed. Each truss was built with a channel in its bottom to accom-



BROTHERS AND BUILDERS: Steve Leonhard, left, and his brother Cletus at work in the dining area of a home they have been working

on in Sheboygan. The pair, along with brother Jake, form Leonhard's Building Service. — Press photo by Gary Weber

Considerations for would-be builders

Thinking of building? Whether it will be remodeling or new construction, Jake Leonhard recommends that certain items be considered before the first shovelful of dirt is turned.

■ **RESALE VALUE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD:** Will the prevailing home prices allow you to recover the cost of improvements? If not, do you plan to stay there for a long time?

■ **LOCATION:** Do you like your current neighbors, the schools and stores nearby? If so, plan to stay and remodel or add on to your existing home.

■ **COMPARATIVE PRICES:** Know what you are comparing. Quality and price vary greatly in appliances, plumbing fixtures and lighting fixtures. Make sure you are comparing oranges to oranges.

■ **THE BUDGET:** How much can you afford? You should have an idea in mind so that you don't find yourself in over your head.

■ **CAN YOU DO SOME WORK YOURSELF?** Decide if you are willing to do some work yourself. Owners can save a lot by doing unskilled work, such as demolition and, if handy, other jobs such as insulation, painting, staining and installation of carpet and vinyl.

■ **DON'T BE YOUR OWN GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** This usually doesn't work. Very few laymen can do the necessary scheduling and coordinating successfully. Few have the skill to oversee the work of all the trades involved.

■ **AN ITEMIZED LIST:** Get one with your estimate including such particulars as the window brand, type of roofing, grade of floor joist, etc.

modate the recessed lighting in the ceiling — another Leonhard custom touch.

Jake likens remodeling to hidden treasure.

"You don't know what you'll find until you open it up, until you get in there. It's more involved, with more things out of the ordinary and we like challenges. We're not afraid to tackle anything."

They have been tackling interesting projects for 20 years but their hearts have been in it even longer. Their grandfather

was a carpenter and their dad worked with him.

"We grew up with it," says Jake. "We followed in their footsteps."

Steve went on his own in 1972 and Jake joined him out of high school the following year. Cletus, the youngest, was the last to come on board.

Some of their earliest jobs were the quonset hut for Pizza Barn at Sixth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, and the former Kroos-Mason Funeral Home at Eighth Street and

Michigan Avenue. More recently they raised the roof, so to speak, for a downtown law firm. Part of the nine month project at 602 N. Sixth Street was to create additional office space which was accomplished by raising the roof and making space on the second floor. The new roof has more than 20 different angles.

All three brothers are equally competent, whether laying out from blueprints or making cabinets in the shop. Steve usually does the estimat-

ing and Cletus is a whiz at crunching numbers on the job. Jake explains they all question each other and discuss which is the better way to solve a particular problem. "We get along well and we all pull our own load."

Business is looking good for 1992. They want to build a "spec house" — a house built by a builder who then looks for a buyer — but they will have to wait until November. They're booked solid until then.