

Daughter takes the reins at Avtec Homes

BY ANNE STRAUB
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

The changing of the guard at a local homebuilder has put a sixth-generation contractor at the head of a company while adding to the ranks of woman-led builders.

Sandi Forest took the helm of Avtec Homes at the start of the year, taking the title of president of the company she started with her father, Larry Sietsma. Sietsma, who started Holiday Builders in 1983, had been serving as president of Avtec.

"My heart has always been in building," said

Forest, who grew up in the business. Before starting Avtec, she worked as a real estate appraiser. Forest holds an MBA from Florida Tech and is a certified residential contractor and a LEED accredited professional, through the U.S. Green Building Council.

As an appraiser, Forest had a front-row seat as the run-up in housing prices began to crowd new buyers out of the market. When her father, who had sold Holiday and retired, approached her about starting a company that would build for first-time buyers, she agreed.



Larry Sietsma, left, has handed the presidency of his company Avtec Homes over to his daughter Sandi Forest, right, who took role at the start of the year.

Avtec Eco-Star

Avtec Homes has created a niche building energy efficient homes while keeping prices down. Among the features of its Eco-Star High Performance Homes are:

- 80-gallon solar water heater.
- 15-SEER air conditioning system.
- High R-value insulation in ceiling and walls.
- Solar-powered attic vent fans.
- Low-e double-pane windows.
- CFL lighting throughout.

For more information, visit www.avtechomes.com.

Avtec Homes came on the scene, offering new homes for \$149,900, including home site, during a time when habitable houses at that price were difficult to find. While investors were buying up streets of homes in

new subdivisions, Avtec declined to sell to non-resident owners.

After the market dropped, some builders closed their doors. Avtec, instead, adjusted its strategy to continuing to build affordable houses,

but with an emphasis on energy efficiency.

The company consulted with the Florida Solar Energy Center and other experts to evaluate building techniques and gauge whether the cost of the improvement offered enough

savings to justify itself. For example, Avtec uses solar-powered attic vent fans and higher R-value ceiling and wall insulation, but forgoes the spray foam insulation some builders use under the roof. The

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added efficiency didn't justify the foam's price tag, Forest said.

Using double-furring strips and special electrical boxes means the builder doesn't have to cut holes in exterior walls to install power. "That's a little thing, but it helps," she said.

The result is the company's Eco-Star package, which Avtec estimates adds \$10,000 to the price of a home.

An outside company has evaluated the package and concluded that homeowners of Eco-Star homes will pay 50 percent less on their power bill compared with owners of a typical existing home. "It pays for itself," Forest said.

Avtec is building in the Manchester Lakes subdivision, and has lots available in Palm Bay. The company also is building homes for buyers who have their own land. Last year, Avtec built more than 30 homes in Brevard.

Prices start at \$140,000 for a home in Palm Bay, including home site, and slightly more in Manchester Lakes.

"After six years as Avtec's South Brevard division manager, Sandi has shown that she is ready to take the company to greater heights," Sietsma said. "Sandi has shown that she has a heart for attainable housing and she is looking forward to making improvements in that area." **HF**



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